DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 535 EC 111 936

AUTHOR Leonard, Carol J.
TITLE The Bilingual-Bilcultural Frame of Reference from the Social Worker's Point of View.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the World Congress on Future Special Education (First, Stirling, Scotland, June 25 - July 1, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Biculturalism; Bilingualism; *Cultural Differences; *Cultural Factors; *Handicapped Children; *Navajo; *Social Workers

ABSTRACT

The paper considers the social worker's role in working with families of handicapped Navajo children. Cultural practices in marriage, pregnancy and family life are discussed and implications for parent education are examined. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

- ED159535

THE BILINGUAL-BICULTURAL FRAME OF REFERENCE FROM THE SOCIAL WORKER'S POINT OF VIEW

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Ms Carol J Leonard
Chinle Valley School for Exceptional Children
Chinle, Navajo Nation, Arizona

Social Work with the Navajo Native American is truly an edifying experience that one can have if given the opportunity. I, being a Native American Navajo had such an opportunity. I believe that being a Native American helps because the person can fully dedicate himself to meeting the needs of the Navajo Population, unlike the Anglo social worker with the Native American client.

The basis is that the client relates to the service provider and secondly, the worker identifies with the client. Therefrom, the understanding that emerges is difficult to erase. Communications also flows freely and much training and learning can be obtained by both parties

The Navajo family is one that can be defined as an extended family. Because of this nature, the family is quite flexible to work with. Working within the framework, the extended family has its advantages. First of all, there are more members of a family to work with. Secondly, this framework is viable because it concurs with the lifestyle of the Navajo. To work only with the immediate family would mean excluding the other important

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

CEC

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

EC111936

family members (for example, grandparents. uncles, aunts, etc.)

The Navajo extended family consist of the natural parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, nieces, ccusins and nephews. This can be from the maternal and paternal sides.

The role of the Navajo family is viewed as providing education in proper social behavior. It raises the young children, and is a source of identity and strenght. Thus, the culture is preserved and for the most part the culture is transmitted.

The definition of the Navajo family will be discussed here. There may be more than one marriage partner. A Navajo person can marry outside the culture, but marrying within the Navajo culture and religion is a standard and very much preferred. When a Navajo couple complete the wedding ceremony, they must live with the bride's family. They are not supposed to live with the groom's family. The bride is then given the authority over matters concerning the household, specifically the children. The husband on the other hand, is reponsible for maintaining the livestock, and the upkeep of the family tools.

In regards to raising children, the mother must breast feed the infant. She must provide warm meals, keep the hogan warm, mend the clothes, and maintain discipline. She must be certain proper social behavior is learned. She may do this through telling Navajo legends and stories that have been carried on by word of mouth for centuries. If the child has seriously misbehaved, the mother has the authority to punish the child.

Here, I am referring to a Navajo mother disciplining a "normal" child. If the parents were to receive a mentally retarded child, they would treat him or her in a different manner. The Navajos believe that to have more than seven children is taboo. It is believed that if a handicapped child is born to Navajo parents, they should insure that the child share and participate in all family activities and ceremonies. He is used as an example to show the other children that there are handicaps and disabilities.

Because the traditional Navajo believes that the handicap or the disability is caused by an outside force or an agent of the environment and not a disease or brain injury, it is usually very difficult to serve a handicapped child at a very early age. The parents do not have access to medical expertise such as physicians, psychologists and other medical technicias. Often times,a child's retardation is not diagnosed early enough.

This is especially true of traditional Navajos families. What is a traditional Navajo family, one may wonder? In all instances, the parents are both Navajo and speak little or no English at all. Because of their "illiteracy" , they are not employed in good paying jobs. Their homes do not have all the comforts of modern conveniences, such as electricity, heating, plumbing, and comfortable floors. Instead, members of the extended family crowd into a one room hogan. These hogans are dwellings that do not let themselves to different rooms for the purpose of leisure, sleep, eating or bathing. Above all there is no privacy.

It is common not to see beds, chairs, washing machines, or other furniture.

As a result, social work with the Navajo family has cultural implications. A social worker cannot begin to help the family if a relationship of some sort has not been established. The clan system is very important to the families. In an initial client referral, the child's clans (maternal and paternal), are obtained and written down for the files. Also, the names of Navajo sings and ceremonies that have been performed for the child are written down. A sing,or a ceremony is a confession to the Earth and to nature. It is a re-enactement of an event that took place years ago.

In the Navajo way, one always introduces oneself as to what clan one belongs to and the label (name) that he/she is given. This is the beginning of the establishment of a meaningful relationship with someone, groups and others. As a relationship is established, a specific mode of interaction is also established, i.e., if one is a clan relative the addresses are made revering that specific relationship throughout the tenure of the interaction and certainly in future interaction activities.

Why is the belief that interaction be important to the Navajo? Because in the development of personality in the traditional Navajo society, much attention is given to the proper nurturing of the female members of their society. Special attention is given to girls as they reach ages of puberty. Care an attention and respect must be afforded MOTHER EARTH, the female symbol in our society. As care and respect is afforded the earth it will procreate so that the needs of beings can

be fulfilled in cyclical consistency. Human beings are a part of nature not above nature.

The female in the Navajo society then is very much revered. As the female reaches puberty, additional care is afforded in a planned organized way in keeping with how nature evolves itself in an orderly way. The young girl who has reached puberty has performed for her and with special rituals all in preparation for her to procreate. The attention given in detail and in sincerity is all important to the development of the new one which has not been conceived yet.

As a part of the special attention to the young woman, efforts are extended to find a "proper" mate for her. Here it is acknowledged that a prospective mate should be well established reputably in the social, economic and spiritual status. These characteristics will enhance the proper development of the "new one's" personality.

With careful planning a male and female are joined in marriage. The lunar system serves as the calendar. The stellar system serves as the calendar also and as the time and the forecaster of possible unusual activities. With this, conception is carefully planned in keeping with the type of person the couple and their families felt they needed for their society. After conception, particular rites are performed all in keeping with the need. The sex of the new being is never discussed as to preference, except that the new being will be either a pollen male or a white corn or yellow corn female.

Songs are sung throughout the pregnancy to influence the proper position of the new being and to influence the personality of the new being and so that there would be little difficulty in the delivery.

They say that if there is difficulty in delivery, the new born may develop a very temperamental personality because something went amiss during the preparation.....

As the new child is delivered, the umbilical cord is severed, and as this activity is taking place, there are simultaneously songs sung to help influence the new one to mold after someone's image, i.e., the mother or the father or some relative, or some leader. One role is identified and the molding of one's role begins with particular herbal use for specific types of roles and/or personality. The new oneis given herbs by mouth to cleanse inside and to rid of possible unwanted influences. They say that if the secretion of the placenta is not flushed out of the new one's system, the new one may develop a very jealous personality. The herbs are given the first four days during which time the new one is not allowed to have any other intake, not even the mother's milk.

The soft spot of the newborn's head is positioned towards the open fire, in the center of the dwelling. They say that this expedites the child's motor development. The minute the new child is delivered, the medicine man identifies the sex of the child and then admonishes the mother to establish the proper relationship with the child, such as " Your are my son" or "your are my daughter" and emphatically announce, " my loving child"....

Thus the Navajo regards all of his interaction as beirg important to his life, as from these experiences he/she develops behavioral patterns. Interaction must also be regarded as being a part of what is natural with the individual (s) being a part of the total or the individual (s) is/are in reciprocity with nature and its elements, such

as air, water, astronomy, the lunar system, plants, herbs, and fowl.

At the conclusion of a ceremony or a sing, the medicine man asks the patient no to eat certain types of food, visit certain areas of activity, such as zoos, cemeteries, museums, and to refrain from participating in funerals. This is the medicine man's prescription and it must be followed to the letter. If not, the ceremony will not be effective and another one will have to be performed. The medicine man may also ask that the patient drink certain herbs and to refrain from taking alcohol. He may prescribe more ceremonies that need to be performed.

Should any part of this balance of nature be broken or upset by the breaking of a taboo, the Navajo believes that the new one or the new being will enter the world handicapped or disabled. The Navajo also believe that if the family does not have a sing for the mother and the new one, the new one may also be born handicapped.

This is the Navajo parent's reality. The ceremonies and sings, whether they last one day or one week, constitute a minute part of the Navajo religion and way of life. This is the way of life. This is the very reason behind recording the details of sings in the child's personal educational folder.

Since Navajo parents have feelings of inadequacy, when it it comes to education and schooling, they feel that their own education is insufficient or antiquated. Some parents have never received any type of formal education. An Anglo may be

heard to say "in the old days, there were only one room schools" . The Navajo, on the contrary may say: "in the old days there were no schools". Today, the huge school buildings make the parents feel that they have little effect. They reveal feelings that they should not comment on the education of their child. This seems to be especially true in the field of special education. As a consequence, the family becomes alienated. The initial resistence in becoming involved is a good indicator that the parent is feeling unworthy.

In addition to getting services for their disabled child, the family has to grapple with other survival needs. The parents must find sources of income to provide for the large number of family members. There are few jobs and good steady employment is difficult to obtain. The lack of money also makes it hard for a family to own transportation. These are just a few of the difficulties that inconvenience the parents.

It is very important that the social worker understands and see this. The worker must become sensitized to this aspect of the culture of the Native American. The different tribes are not alike in respect to the different ceremonies. The beliefs about the supernatural are also not similar.

Another area that social workers and service providers need to understand is the role of religions and cultural beliefs that influence the parent's use of services. The myths that the general public has about the disabled or handicapped Native American is distorted and unrealistic.

I realize that there are many other areas that need to be mentioned in the area of social working with the Native American. Some areas that I will mention are genetic counseling, family planning, parenting, guardianship, parent education and parent advocacy. Presently there are no words or phrases in the Navajo language to mean genes, cells, chromosomes, service providers, etc. This makes it even more difficult to translate and interpret for the purpose of parent training and parent awareness. This is the challenge that the social worker will face.

He/she will have to improvise and use ingenuity in devising a vocabulary that will transmit the concepts of special education.